

# Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards

## Introduction

Research, insights from practice, and common sense converge around the understanding that skilled teachers have a significant impact on student learning. Helping teachers develop the knowledge and skills they need begins with rigorous teacher training programs. Subsequently, effective professional development helps teachers continue enhancing their knowledge and skills throughout their careers.

Maryland's Teacher Professional Development Standards are intended to guide efforts to improve professional development for all teachers. These standards call on teachers, principals and other school leaders, district leaders and staff, the Maryland State Department of Education, institutions of higher education, and cultural institutions and organizations<sup>1</sup> across the state to work together to ensure that professional development is of the highest quality and readily accessible to all teachers. These standards also acknowledge that teacher professional development encompasses a wide variety of learning activities. The list includes, but is certainly not limited to, teacher study groups, coaching and mentoring relationships, teacher networks, participation on school improvement teams and committees that develop curricula and assessments, workshops, and college and university courses.

When fully implemented, these standards and the related indicators can help improve the quality of professional development by:

- Providing a clear vision of high-quality professional development that recognizes local needs, priorities, and resources;
- Guiding planning, designing, implementing, and evaluating high-quality professional development, including both professional development programs and an entire professional development agenda;
- Supporting alignment of professional development with goals for improving student learning and state, district, and school policies and priorities;
- Informing allocation of resources for professional development; and
- Defining accountability for ensuring that professional development is of the highest quality and readily accessible to all teachers.

## Context for High-Quality Teacher Professional Development in Maryland

The Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards are derived from the National Staff Development Council's (NSDC) Standards for Staff Development.<sup>2</sup> Like the NSDC standards, the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards rest on several fundamental assumptions about contextual factors that are critical to ensuring that professional development is effective.

- **Professional development is most effective when it takes place in vibrant professional learning communities.** These learning communities take various forms, but they all value ongoing learning by teachers and students. They encourage individual and collaborative experimentation, practice, and reflection. They foster collegiality and problem solving, and they emphasize continuous improvement in classrooms and schools.
- **Professional development is most effective when there are strong leaders.** These leaders recognize the value of high-quality professional development, encourage and facilitate teacher participation, and communicate about the benefits of professional development to key stakeholders (e.g., parents, school boards, county commissioners). Ideally, leadership for professional development is distributed among teachers, principals and other administrators, district staff, MSDE, and institutions of higher education, and various cultural organizations. At the same time, no single formula defines the appropriate distribution of leadership.

- **Professional development is most effective when there are adequate resources.** Resources include money, people, and time. Just as leadership should be distributed, resources (people and money) can come from a variety of sources, with no single organization or stakeholder group expected to shoulder the whole burden. Careful analysis of how time is used in school schedules, district calendars, negotiated agreements and other policy documents can lead to more time for teacher learning. All of these resources will be used most effectively when allocations are coordinated and when there is careful assessment of the returns on investments in professional development. As with leadership, no single formula defines the adequacy of resources. Instead, resources are adequate when they ensure that all teachers can study, practice, and implement the knowledge and skills necessary to be effective with their students.

The Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards rest on a fourth assumption which is consistent with the NSDC definition of effective professional development.

- **Professional development is most effective when there is consensus around clear expectations for what teachers should know and be able to do to help all students learn.** These expectations are shared among all stakeholders and district and school leaders work to build understanding and consensus around them. The expectations are reflected in negotiated agreements, job descriptions and assignments, performance appraisal systems, systems of rewards and incentives for teachers, and in the design and content of teacher professional development.

In the end, the formula for effectiveness is simple: When these four elements are in place, professional development can be highly effective. When they are missing or underdeveloped, professional development will not be effective and will have limited impact on teaching and learning.

## Standards and Indicators Define High-Quality Professional Development

### Content Standards

**I. Content knowledge and quality teaching** - Effective professional development deepens all teachers' content knowledge and the knowledge and skills necessary to provide effective instruction and assess student progress.

#### Indicators:

- 1a. Professional development includes learning experiences and resources to ensure that teachers understand how the subject(s) they teach addresses the Maryland content standards and the relationships between the subjects they teach and other subjects in the curriculum.
- 1b. Professional development provides opportunities for teachers to examine, observe, practice, and receive feedback on their use of research-based instructional strategies to help all of their students master Maryland content standards.
- 1c. Professional development provides ongoing opportunities for teachers to examine a variety of classroom assessments, practice using them in their classrooms, and analyze the results to (1) understand and report on student mastery of Maryland content standards, (2) identify gaps in student learning, and (3) adjust instruction.

**II. Research-based** - Effective professional development ensures that all teachers have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to apply research to decision making.

#### Indicators:

- 2a. Professional development includes ongoing opportunities for teachers to read and reflect on current research on topics of interest to them and consistent with state and local school improvement priorities.
- 2b. Professional development may involve two-way interactions with researchers to discuss research design, data collection, analysis, and reporting to assist teachers in understanding what works, particularly in areas where there may be competing perspectives and conclusions.
- 2c. Professional development involves individual teachers or teams of teachers, often in collaboration with researchers, in action research to test their own hypotheses and to report the

<sup>1</sup> Cultural institutions include libraries, museums, and similar kinds of organizations.

<sup>2</sup> The NSDC standards were developed in 1995 and revised in 2001. The Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards are derived from the 2001 version of the NSDC standards.

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results about professional development program impact or the effectiveness of particular instructional strategies and programs for teachers and students.

**III. Collaboration** - Effective professional development ensures that teachers have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to collaborate with others to improve instruction.

Indicators:

- 3a. Professional development provides ongoing opportunities for teachers to practice working with colleagues, including other teachers, principals, counselors, social workers, and others, and emphasizes that collaboration is a means and not an end in addressing issues related to school improvement and improved student learning.
- 3b. Professional development emphasizes constructive management of conflict and fosters understanding that disagreement and conflict are potentially beneficial elements of professional discourse.
- 3c. Professional development relies on communication technologies to broaden the scope of collaboration.

**IV. Diverse learning needs** - Effective professional development ensures that all teachers have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to meet the diverse learning needs of all of their students.

Indicators:

- 4a. Professional development focuses on developing teachers' understanding of and disposition to acknowledge the diversity of student learning styles and needs.
- 4b. Professional development provides opportunities for teachers to develop and demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary to design and implement instructional and assessment strategies that meet diverse student learning needs and help all students master Maryland content standards.
- 4c. Professional development fosters teachers' respect for all students and guides teachers in setting and maintaining high expectations for all students to demonstrate proficiency on Maryland content standards.

**V. Student learning environments** - Effective professional development ensures that all teachers are able to create safe, secure, and supportive learning environments for all students.

Indicators:

- 5a. Professional development fosters a safe, inclusive, equitable learning community where teachers, administrators and students participate in maintaining a climate of caring and respect.
- 5b. Professional development provides opportunities for teachers to develop and practice student ownership of management routines and practice creative solutions to conflicts.
- 5c. Professional development provides opportunities for teachers to use data on student behavior such as discipline referrals, suspension information and school climate surveys to analyze and refine practices that promote optimal learning environments.

**VI. Family involvement** - Effective professional development ensures that all teachers have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to involve families and other community members as active partners in their children's education.

Indicators:

- 6a. Professional development provides opportunities for teachers to develop and demonstrate oral and written communication skills to build partnerships with parents and community members and to communicate expectations for student mastery of Maryland content standards and success on approved national, state, and local assessments.
- 6b. Professional development fosters teachers' understanding and respect for varying cultural backgrounds of students, families, and the community and how the diversity and richness of these cultural backgrounds can serve as foundations for student learning.
- 6c. Professional development includes opportunities for teachers to master the use of technology to strengthen partnerships with families and the community.

### Process Standards

**VII. Data-driven** - Effective teacher professional development relies on rigorous analysis of data.

Indicators:

- 7a. Individuals who plan professional development have ready access to high-quality student data from various sources that are organized in user-friendly formats.
- 7b. Individuals who plan professional development have the knowledge and skills necessary to use disaggregated student data (by race, gender, English language learners, special education, and eligibility for free or reduced price meals) for planning, implementation, and evaluation of professional development and instructional programs.
- 7c. School and district schedules set aside time for teachers and others to examine student data as the starting point for planning professional development.
- 7d. Individuals who plan professional development carefully analyze a variety of disaggregated student data to identify gaps between student learning and standards for proficiency to inform the choice of the content of professional development.
- 7e. As appropriate to school and district needs, data analysis focuses on results from approved national, state, and local assessments, as well as student work samples and portfolios, and behavioral indicators such as attendance and disciplinary referrals.

**VIII. Evaluation** - Rigorous evaluations assess the impact of professional development on teaching and student learning.

Indicators:

- 8a. Individuals who plan professional development ensure that plans include adequate resources for an objective evaluation and for reporting and disseminating the results.
- 8b. Individuals who plan professional development (1) identify the kinds of evidence about teaching and student learning that will be collected and used as indicators of the success of professional development, and (2) consistent with progress benchmarks and goals, determine how and when the data will be collected and reported.
- 8c. Evaluation should also assess the impact of professional development on school culture and organization to support school improvement efforts.
- 8d. Sponsors of professional development communicate the results of evaluations to key stakeholder groups, including teachers, school and district leaders, central office staff, providers, policymakers, and parents, in a timely fashion.

**IX. Design and teacher learning** - Effective professional development content and process reflect best practices in workplace learning and in-depth understanding of how and why adults learn.

Indicators:

- 9a. Professional development matches learning experiences, including the intensity and duration, with individual teacher needs, current knowledge and skills, and learning goals.
- 9b. Professional development combines a variety of learning experiences, including, but not limited to, individual study, demonstrations, observation, practice, feedback, and reflection as well as opportunities for collaboration and problem solving among colleagues.
- 9c. Professional development provides extensive follow-up, including, but not limited to, classroom demonstrations, feedback on mastery of new knowledge, feedback on demonstration of new skills, peer coaching and mentoring, and opportunities for additional study.
- 9d. Professional development relies on information technologies to provide more extensive and diverse content, and it also relies on communication technologies to expand access and participation and to create virtual professional learning communities.
- 9e. Professional development recognizes and draws on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of successful teachers by including them as leaders, facilitators, and resources in professional learning opportunities.